

Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": The Hon. Paula Dobriansky Oral Testimony

November 27, 2001 MS. DOBRIANSKY: Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate that, and again my apologies for being delayed. I plan to submit my fuller text, testimony, for the record, and instead will make a briefer statement this morning. I'm very delighted in fact to be here with you this morning. It certainly is a pleasure to testify for the first time before the Commission on International Religious Freedom, and it certainly is very timely, and it's a good opportunity to continue our dialogue, particularly at a time when religious freedom and other human rights issues are very central to our human rights and foreign policy concerns and efforts. This panel, as you know, you've entitled it "The World After September 11: A Strategic Shift in U.S. Foreign Policy." Well, clearly, there indeed have been significant changes. While our priorities and partners have changed though, our principles have not, and that's what I'd like to really focus on this morning, the continued importance of democracy and human rights in our foreign policy and how we can, in advancing human rights, in particular religious freedom, further our overall foreign policy goals in the post-September 11 period. You posed four questions, and I wanted to use those four questions as well as a response, at least an opportunity to put this issue in context. First you posed the question: "How has U.S. foreign policy to promote human rights, including religious freedom, changed as a result of the events of September 11th?" Well, our security concerns have taken on a new dimension, and we are faced with the task of eradicating the al Qaeda terrorist network as well as other terrorist threats. That said, our commitment to promote democracy and human rights has not changed. In fact, the role that these issues play in overall policy priorities, and particularly in the fight against terrorism has been enhanced in many ways. More committed to a longer term effort of rooting out the underlying causes of terrorism. This is a law enforcement issue. It's an intelligence issue. But it is also undoubtedly a democracy and human rights issue. Giving up on our human rights and democracy efforts, essentially policy initiatives that have made great strides over the past decades, would essentially be to capitulate to the very desires of the terrorists. International terrorism threatens the institutions that protect the dignity of human beings including the rule of law, the international commitment to fundamental freedoms and human rights. The terrorists seek to undermine the values and ideologies that they see as a threat to them. We want to continue to show that an open accountable government which respects the rights of its citizens, even the right of peaceful opposition, is a strong government, able to form coalitions, to share power, to practice pluralism. And that these governments are best positioned to combat extremist elements within their own societies. We have and will continue to carry this message to our coalition partners. Now, the second question that you pose is how the process of making foreign policy has changed since September 11, including the relative influence of the various offices and agencies in the U.S. Government. I'm going to give a brief response on this, but if you want to pursue this further, I'd be glad to go into more detail, because actually the way in which we're dealing with many of the aspects, be it public diplomacy, be it humanitarian assistance, be it reconstruction and the planning for the future of Afghanistan, these are being handled in multiple ways but in an integrated way. Now, while we have strengthened the ranks, I think in several areas, namely in counter-terrorism and homeland security, we continue to pursue our agenda with the assets we had before. There is, I believe, stronger coordination between agencies and with the White House. We will also continue to work very closely with our interagency partners, and this really means across the board. We consult regularly with the Hill and testify on a range of human rights and democracy issues. Also in this process our nongovernmental organization partners are indispensable resources and sounding boards. Both our American and indigenous partners have invaluable perspectives about the situation on the ground and provide us with an important record of what is going on, and they work closely with our embassies. In fact, as Under Secretary, I have had the opportunity to meet many of our outgoing ambassadors and to discuss issues pertaining to human rights and democracy and no less broad global issues with them. In addition, I have also been a speaker at every ambassadorial seminar which has been held by the Department of State, which also affords me the opportunity for those that I may not see individually in my office to discuss these issues in the context of the seminar. Let me go to the third question, how the changes in U.S. foreign policy since September 11 affect the ability and willingness of the United States to promote human rights including religious freedom, especially in countries cooperating in the campaign against terrorism. Many have raised concern that we are partnering for the same of our counter-terrorism objectives with some countries with less than stellar human rights records. It is true that our coalition for fighting terrorism is diverse, but we have not, however, suppressed our objections to their human rights violations because of this increased cooperation. We have and will continue to raise our concerns with our partners regardless of their level of counter-terrorism cooperation. They are not mutually exclusive goals. As you saw during the President's trip to China, during the APEC meetings, he stated publicly that the war on terrorism was not a green light to crack down on innocent minorities in the name of security. There cannot have been, I believe, a clearer message. Another example was the OSCE conference in Warsaw this September. There too we made religious freedom a priority. The coalition is an opportunity to engage countries on their human rights records, or have increased our dialogue with countries like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and other central Asian neighbors. Do not confuse progress on terrorism with the desire to turn a blind eye to other issues. We have not and will not do so. It will undermine our longer-term objectives to fight terrorism, and it will be divergence from the ideals for which we stand. Let me address the final question: "Can promoting religious freedom be a tool in the campaign against terrorism?" I think that the short answer is yes, although it is complex, but it is, I believe, yes. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of our democracy promotion and human rights efforts. It's intertwined. In short, to protect freedom of religion and conscience, as well as the rule of law, is to create conditions which mitigate against terrorism. Terrorism is a form of fanaticism borne of hatred. At its best religion is and can be an antidote to fanaticism. Religious freedom gives a voice to all citizens of a country and protects their rights to practice and

express their faith. Religious freedom undermines the very religious extremism that some governments seek to suppress by forbidding religious freedom. Let me just make a few other general points on the importance of religious freedom and how we've been engaged. We ought to continue to highlight the United States support for freedom of religion. An assertive U.S. religious policy will help win the war on terrorism ultimately I think by building bridges to the Muslim world, for example. We must highlight that this is a war to protect human rights and religious freedom, so it is a war also to protect the practice of Islam. We need to make a clear case to those who are persecuted and those who persecute. We must show that promoting religious freedom is a win/win for both governments fearful of extremists and religious minorities who feel they have no voice. While September 11 was one of the most horrific days in American history, we-- and I think that this is characteristic of the American spirit--can turn this tragedy into a springboard for some positive developments, while we use this opportunity borne out of religious intolerance and hatred to promote the basic fundamentals that will strengthen our security and world peace. The promotion of democracy, or religious freedom and other human rights will be our long-term weapon in our arsenal of weapons against terrorism. Thank you again for inviting me today. I'm very pleased to be here and I look forward to our exchange.